Exploring literature for children of incarcerated parents

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Exploring Literature For Children
Of Incarcerated Parents

by
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Exploring Literature For Children Of Incarcerated Parents

by, Tara Di Gerlando

ABSTRACT

I have written a children's book about separation considering specifically a child who is separated from his mother because of incarceration. Though the story does not explicitly say that the mother is incarcerated, my story is based on a real life story of a son and mother who were separated for almost 20 years, due to incarceration. The research in this paper investigates the educational need for children's literature that conveys the theme of a child coping with a physical separation from their parent. Based on the statistics and challenges of a child staying connected with their incarcerated parent, there is a clear need for resources which offer ways in which a child can cope and remain emotionally connected to their parent when they cannot be with them. This book was created because of a close personal connection to a family who experienced this type of separation first hand. Their story moved me to write this book so other families can find ways of coping with forced separation.
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RATIONALE

There has been a movement to introduce literature dealing with cultural diversity and circumstance, in classrooms in both progressive education settings and even in more traditional classroom contexts. The education world is constantly evolving and a big aspect of that evolution is reflective of the increase in diverse student populations in all schools across the country. Diversity is a term that can take on different meanings in a variety of contexts and often refers to or focuses mostly on ethnicity or race. In this paper, the word diversity is being used to describe the idea of differentiation in the culture of an individual's reality. For example, one student in a classroom may have two mothers and may be an only child, whereas there is another child who is adopted and only has a mother and yet another student is living and being raised by his/her grandmother or uncle. The driving concept here is that diversity means that each persons' experience is different from someone else's circumstances or experiences.

In order to acknowledge and utilize the diverse population, teachers and administrators are making bigger efforts to address this diversity. As more and more educators are faced with the realities of their diverse classrooms, they are working on creating ways to share and celebrate these differences through communication and support for their students' circumstances. One way that teachers are doing this is through the use of literature. Literature is an entry point and can offer a means of understanding these various circumstances that are reflective of an individual's experience. There are several articles on this
topic and how the application of knowledge of cultural pluralism beginning in the young elementary grades leads to agency, equity, tolerance and empathy for all students.

Geneva Gay explains that without the use of culturally aware discussions in school, people within the context of society would lack a tolerance and understanding of the diverse populations in which they live and would create tensions amongst these various cultural groups. She goes on to say:

Multicultural education can ease these tensions by teaching skills in cross-cultural communication, interpersonal relations, perspective taking, contextual analysis, understanding alternative points of view and frames of reference, and analyzing how cultural conditions affect values, attitudes, beliefs, preferences, expectations, and behaviors. It also can help students learn how to understand cultural differences without making hasty and arbitrary value judgments about their intrinsic worth. Attaining these goals can be expedited by providing wide varieties of opportunities for students to practice their cultural competence and to interact with different ethnic peoples, experiences, and situations (Gay).

In Gay’s article, she analyzes the variety of meanings of studying diversity within education, why it’s necessary and the variety of approaches that have and can be used when incorporating this into a classroom. One of the approaches she describes directly discusses the use of literature as a vehicle for introducing concepts of diversity and cultural differences amongst students. Gay says, this approach to multicultural education “combines content and process, and is often referred to as infusion” (Gay, 3). This practice employs “culturally pluralistic content, experiences, and perspectives in teaching other knowledge and skills”
(Gay, 3). Through this literature approach, students are able to infer meaning of other cultures, increase their vocabulary within this context, heighten their spectrum of knowledge and, overall, become comfortable with the discussion of diversity because they have the tools to do so.

It is one thing to recognize that this topic is vital for a classroom, but how can teachers incorporate the discussion and exploration of diversity into their classes across a variety of grades and in appropriate situations? It is important to take into consideration what is developmentally appropriate for the age group you are teaching, and then explore the use of various methods and components that students can respond to and reflect on at a developmentally appropriate level. In his article, Guofang Wan explores using children’s literature with a thematic approach to introduce and address diversity. Wan writes:

> Literature is the essence of communication. Through it, we share our opinions, values, experiences, and what makes us happy and sad… We share the most personal aspects of our culture and the ways in which we identify with a particular ethnicity, geographical region, religion or other cultural groups. Thus, literature becomes a great resource for us to study our various cultures. The study of literature allows us to see that people of different cultures are more similar than different from each other (Wan, 141).

Wan cites studies conducted by Mathis (2001) which explored the teachers’ role in using multicultural literature, and that it went beyond just the book itself. The books not only offered information about other cultures and experiences, but also initiated activities, discussion and self-reflective thinking in the classroom. Through these studies it was found that the use of these storybooks with
students, “tends to foster more positive self-perception and more positive view of schools” (Wan, 142). Wan focuses on using a variety of books, all from different cultures, that are centered around one theme; Family values, folktales, religion, ways of life, etc. He supports that the books should be not only up-to-date in information, have visual representations of the cultures, but also allow entry points for conversation and critical thinking among their students as well as provide possibilities to explore these cultures through hands-on projects and activities. This article supports the notion that children’s awareness and knowledge of diversity and cultural differences, which exists both in their classroom and in the world, can be deepened through the use of diverse literature. Teachers can provide a safe and informative environment for their students to learn about other peoples’ experiences and circumstances besides their own. The use of literature for open discussions about diversity is a good entry point for young students. Using literature to shape these conversations and awareness will help shape children into more active and aware citizens.

Parents and children can become separated for long periods of time in a variety of ways; immigration, incarceration, divorce, military service, job, etc. These situations present parents with the challenge of maintaining their relationships with their child from a distance. I wanted to look closely at the specific cultural topic of a child with an incarcerated parent. Even more specifically, I wanted to explore how an incarcerated parent and their child can maintain a connection throughout a forced and prolonged separation. I thought the best way to consider this topic was within the context of children’s literature. I
wanted to create a story that would be age-appropriate for 6-8 year olds, about concrete ways that a connection to a parent can be maintained, even when the parent and child cannot physically be together.

I began by looking at books that deal with parent/child separation in different scenarios. There are several books about a child who does not want to leave their parent to attend school. A book related to this topic that I found was, *The Kissing Hand* by, Audrey Penn. In this story, Chester Raccoon is concerned about separating from his mother to go to school. His mother tells him she has a secret that she has used in her family for a long time. The secret is, the Kissing Hand. The mother raccoon takes her Chester's hand, and kisses the palm. "Chester felt his mother's kiss rush from his hand, up his arm, and into his heart." Whenever he feels lonely at school, all he has to do is press his hand to his cheek to feel the warmth of his mother's kiss. This book demonstrates how a parent and child can create their own way of feeling connected when they cannot be together. There are books about how children deal with divorce and balancing a relationship with both parents. In Linda Walvoord Girard's *At Daddy's on Saturday*, a young girl's parents divorce and she decides she will live with her mother. The author addresses topics such as, placing blame, adjusting to living in two homes and the feeling of sadness as a result of the situation.

These two books, are just a couple of examples of the many books in children's literature that discuss the idea of separation for parent and child in within different contexts.

While there were books about children with an incarcerated parent, they
rarely touched on the idea of how the parent and child create or discover ways of remaining connected beyond actual visiting days. Books that I did find about an incarcerated parent and their child, focused on certain aspects of being in prison, or the anticipation of going to visit a parent in jail. In *Visiting Day*, Jacqueline Woodson, looks closely at the anticipation of a young girl’s trip with her grandmother to visit her father. Simultaneously, the girl envisions her father getting ready for her visit as well. The destination of their trip is not revealed until the end of the book, forcing the story to focus on the anticipation of the father and daughter’s reunion. In the end, "the bus pulls up in front of a big old building where, as Grandma puts it, Daddy is doing a little time." This story is told from a child's point of view and the narrative makes no commentary about why the father is incarcerated.

Another book exploring a relationship between an incarcerated parent and child is *Nine Candles*, by Maria Testa. In this story, a young boy makes his weekly visit to his mother, who is in jail for stealing money from the restaurant where she used to work. "Mama says... she’s never been so sorry for anything in her whole life. I don’t like what she did, but I believe her." Raymond worries that his mother has forgotten his birthday, but is surprised when he arrives and she presents him with a cake. The author notes that one and a half million children in the United States have a parent in prison. This book reveals certain details about prison-life and focuses on the consequences of committing a crime.

In a similar book, *Mama Loves Me From Away*, author Pat Brisson tells the story of a mother and daughter’s relationship when the mother is
incarcerated. The daughter uses her memories of stories her mother would tell her, and looks forward to visiting her mother once a week in prison. However, she must depend on her grandmother to take her for visits, and she is not always able to do so. On the daughter’s birthday, she receives a gift from her mother, a notebook filled with their family stories. This gift is not only special because it is unexpected, but is meaningful as a way that she can always feel close with her mother, despite their separation.

In the book, *When Andy’s Father Went to Prison*, Martha Whitmore Hickman tells the story of a boy’s father being sent to prison. The author describes the young boy’s experiences in first learning his father is guilty of a crime, and then the challenging realization of the daily changes this has made in his life. The boy worries about people discovering the truth about what has happened to his father. The mother of the boy remains loyal to her incarcerated husband, moving close to the prison in order to visit, and encourages her son to stay positive and hope for his father’s parole.

A different style of book, addressing similar issues, is Vera B. Williams’, *Amber was Brave Essie was Smart*. This book tells the hardships of two sisters whose mother works a lot and father is in prison. The book is a collection of poems that share touching moments from the girls’ lives that are both uplifting and also very sad. This book is different from the others because it is written in a different format, which depicts the two sisters’ varying emotions, and how they rely on one another through the ups and downs of their life as a family.

Finally, in *A Visit to the Big House*, by Oliver Butterworth, a brother and
sister along with their mother embark on a visit to see their incarcerated father for the first time. Their mother explains their father’s incarceration to the children and answers several questions they have about what it will be like and what their father will look like in a prison setting. The mother explains that their father “took something that didn’t belong to him”, and now he is making up for it in prison. After they see their father, they understand that he is okay and they are still a family despite his incarceration.

These books explore various aspects of prison, feelings surrounding the actual act of crime as well as the anticipation of seeing an incarcerated parent. With the exception of *Mama Loves Me From Far Away*, none of them directly provide ideas for how a child and parent can find ways to connect beyond limited visitations, letters and phone calls.

When I began researching my thesis topic on the separation between an incarcerated parent and their child, it became obvious that not only is this a relevant issue because of the number of children with incarcerated parents, but also because research shows how important contact between the parent and child is during incarceration. “Approximately 1.7 million children have parents who are incarcerated in prison in the United States” (Poehlmann, Dallaire, Loper & Shear, 575). This reveals that a large percentage of children in this country deal with the obstacles of being physically, and as a result, emotionally separated from a parent. “In 2007, there were 1,706,600 minor children with an incarcerated parent, an 82.2% increase over the 936,500 children in 1991” (The Sentencing Project, 2009).
An important question that needs to be considered is, how do children of incarcerated parents cope with the forced separation from their parent? “Typically, children form bonds to their parent and need the attachment of a parent for emotional development and support. If a child is unable to physically be with their parent, and has limited interaction whether via phone, letters or in person, then there is the potential for a child to encounter a variety of emotional and physical obstacles as a result of the separation. It is stated in the article, Issues Affecting the Efficacy of Programs for Children with Incarcerated Parents, that:

“The separation incurred from parental incarceration may cause a host of negative emotional and psychological effects in both the child and the parent. The extent of the emotional and psychological toll is based on a number of variables, including the age at which the separation occurred, the length of the separation, the child’s familiarity with the new caregiver and the strength of the parent-child relationship. Other factors that may impact child reactions include periods of prior separation, the nature of the parent’s crime, the availability of family or community support, and the degree of stigma that the community associated with incarceration (Gaudin & Supten, 1993)” (Merenstein, Tyson, Tilles, Keays & Rufffolo, 167). This describes a host of feelings, obstacles and outcomes the child or parent may face if contact and connectedness is not maintained while a parent is incarcerated. The question is, how can a parent and child remain connected or keep in contact while separated, when there is physical and emotional distance?

“Frequency of contact between children and parents incarcerated in federal correctional facilities has dropped substantially since 1997; monthly contact has
decreased 28%, while those who report never having contact with their children has increased 17%” (Sentencing Project, 2009). More often than not, it is difficult for a child to visit their parent in prison. Distance and time play a large role in preventing these visits to happen with high frequency. “A key factor explaining the limited contact is that incarcerated parents are generally housed far from home” (Sentencing Project, 2009). Alternative methods of contact involve phone calls and letter writing. This is noted in Children’s Contact with Their Incarcerated Parents: Research Findings and Recommendations:

“Although the majority of imprisoned parents have some contact with their children during the incarceration period, mail contact is much more common than visitation (Maruschak, Glaze, & Mumola). A 2007 survey of state and federal prisoners in the United States revealed that more than three quarters of incarcerated parents had mail contact with their children (52% reported at least monthly mail contact) and more than half had phone contact (38% reported at least monthly phone calls). In contrast, only 42% of state and 55% of federal prisoners had visits with their children during incarceration (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008)” (Poehlmann, Dallaire, Loper & Shear, 578).

While there are other means to stay in contact with an incarcerated parent, childrens’ options are limited. “Because of the relative expense of prison calls, the shortness of their duration and the frequent need to use the opportunity for the adults to convey information, children are often not included except for a fast greeting” (Osborne Association, 28). This makes verbal communication very limited. Hearing the sound of a parent’s voice can provide comfort to a child and is also a reassuring way to connect. Another meaningful way of staying in
contact is also by writing letters through the mail. Although depending on the age of the child, and the limitations on what can be sent to an inmate, can make writing letters a challenging task as well. The Osborne Associate comments on this in their booklet, *How Can I Help? Sustaining and Enhancing Family Ties for Children of Incarcerated Parents*:

Letters and phone calls between incarcerated parents and their children are vitally important components in maintaining relationships. For many families, the only communication between incarcerated parents is through the mail or by telephone. Visits provide the most intimate possibility for communication, not only because they may be the most confidential, but because the physical proximity and the ability to see the person to whom you are speaking allows for the fullest expression of human thoughts and feelings (Osborne Association, 9).

It is clear that maintaining a relationship through some forms of communication, verbal or physical, is a necessity for a child and parent connection during the period of separation. In an effort to maintain routine, there is a hope that children in these circumstances will carry on with their everyday lives, attending school and interacting with their peers in whatever their new living situation is. However, it is important that adults or peers surrounding these children are taking the time to check in with and see how the child is coping. There must be an open line of communication from caregivers, teachers, friends and relatives in order for the child to convey their feelings and management of the situation in a healthy way.

"Because these issues can be so complex and emotional that counselors, teachers, social workers, and others who work in youth-servicing agencies should help to insure that children affected by parental incarceration receive
support” (Osborne Association, 37).

Based on this information and the books I found on this topic, I chose to write a story that dealt with a child and parent finding a variety of ways to feel connected to one another through their separation. In 2008, I befriended Guillermo, son of Nancy and William, former members of a 1960’s anti-war leftist group. In 1981, Nancy and William were convicted for taking part in a robbery, which left a guard and two police officers dead. When Nancy and William were incarcerated, they were forced to leave Guillermo and arranged for close friends to look after him. Guillermo was only 14 months old at the time that his biological parents were arrested. In talking with Guillermo, I found his efforts to balance his life between his biological parents and the people who raised him, who became parents, fascinating. In an interview on Democracy Now, Guillermo spoke about his experience:

Well, it’s hard to sum up all the ups and downs of having parents in prison. I think for me the main thing has been that I’ve been very lucky to have a wonderful support network of family members and extended family. I grew up within a wonderful family and actually had four parents instead of two. So, in that regard I was very lucky. And certainly, compared to most children with parents in prison, I’ve had a lot of opportunities. But it has been hard, especially when I was younger, you know, the stress of visiting my parents and of trying to maintain a relationship and build a relationship with them from the distance that incarceration creates. It was a challenge and I was lucky to have all the support that I had along the way (Goodman & Gonzalez, Augu).

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1 This name has been changed to protect the identity of the person mentioned above
2 This name has been changed to protect the identity of the person mentioned above
3 This name has been changed to protect the identity of the person mentioned above
While incarcerated, both Nancy and William were committed to being a part of Guillermo’s life in whatever way possible. They explained a variety of ways that they would create in order to feel connected to one another during a time when they couldn’t physically be together. Besides letters, phone calls and visits, they relied on concrete experiences and objects to create a sense of closeness. When I discussed this with Guillermo, he explained that things as simple as eating his mom’s favorite flavor of pie, or deciding with her that they would think about each other at a specific time on a particular day allowed them to be together emotionally.

The idea for this book came from a story Nancy shared with me about a phone call between Guillermo and her in which they talked about how they could both see the moon from where they were. This was during a time when the distance and separation was particularly challenging for them, and they could connect by looking at the same moon. From that point on, and still to this day, they make a plan to look at the same moon at the same time. This act allows Nancy, Guillermo and William to feel connected when they are apart. After Nancy shared this story with me, I asked Guillermo if he recalled this incident and he did. Now that Nancy is out of prison, Guillermo shared that they still use the moon to feel connected when they are not in the same place.

Because of my close personal relationship with Nancy and Guillermo, I was touched and interested in their story. More often than not, we can find literature or stories about how to help a child cope with a
short-term separation usually involving a child leaving home or a parental divorce. Rarely do we find literature on the realities of how to cope with a long-term or permanent separation, which comes with incarceration, death, illness, immigration, deployment, job relocation, etc. I wanted to tell this story because within the complex and sad context of their story, they found simplicity of connection, family love and a positive outlook.

Not only did I find this story inspiring and helpful for parents and children who face similar situations, but I felt that it could also reach people who live within a different context of parent/child separation. Additionally, I believe this book could be used as a tool for teachers to facilitate conversations with their students who may be going through a similar situation, finding an entry point to help them cope. In New York City, as an educator, I meet children who face unusual family circumstances and need a safe place and entry point to be able to discuss their feelings surrounding their experiences. In my opinion, this story provides a good entry point and path to discovering ways to discuss, explore and cope with separation from a child’s perspective.
DEVELOPMENT APPROPRIATENESS

I chose to write this story for children who are ages 6-8. I chose this age because of my personal connection to the age and familiarity with books in this age range. This stage: 6-8, “has been defined as a turning point in development across cultures, as a time when the child becomes capable of reasoning, learning and perceiving reality accurately... familial and social expectations of the child also change” (Davies, 338). This book is being written for children 6-8 of middle childhood old because it is a stage, developmentally, where they can begin to understand the concept of long-term separation and the use abstract use of ideas or items that connote the feeling of connection to someone or something. Also at this age, though the dependence on a parent is high, it is not as strong developmentally as a toddler’s dependence on their parent would be. Therefore, the 6-8 year old would be able to find alternative coping mechanisms for the absence of the parent, though the attachment to the parent is still a central role for a child at this age. “Attachment needs are also increasingly transferred to peer relationships as friends begin to provide some of the emotional security and satisfaction that have been present in the parent-child relationship. Children still show attachment behavior, in terms of wanting physical closeness, toward parents in many situations (Davies, 343).

The child character in my story will be age 7 and will be experiencing a lot of relatable feelings to that of a typically developing 7 year old. In the book, the child is separated from his parent and now lives in a different city with close friends of his parents. While these friends do not fulfill the same role as a parent,
the boy is able to accept and depend on them now, accepting them as people who will fulfill a parental role in his life.

Around this age, “even though parents remain central, other adults and peers take on increasing importance” (Davies, 345). While the child character is upset that he cannot be with his parent, he finds other ways to cope, which provide support and comfort. The character in the book also is looking for ways to feel connected to his parent beyond the occasional visits, phone calls and letters in the mail. The character uses memories, or concrete objects or actions which directly relate to their parent because it was an act they would do together. “Piaget and Inhelder (1969) described middle childhood, specifically 7-12 years of age, as the phase of concrete operations. The school-age child learns about reality by manipulating the objects of his perception mentally.... Concrete operations involve basic reasoning processes but are distinguished from formal operations -- abstract, hypothetical thinking -- that continue to develop” (Davies 359). Piaget’s theory about this age range, confirms the ways in which children at this age will find ways to cope or handle emotional and stressful situations.

Moreover, Piaget’s stage of conservation addresses a child’s realization that objects or sets of objects stay the same even when they are changed around or made to look different. These theories show themselves in the story when the child uses specific objects or acts to represent a memory of his mother. For example, for the child, eating strawberry ice cream reminds him of his mother because that is her favorite flavor, whereas for another child, strawberry ice cream may represent a memory of something they did after baseball games.
This shows that children in middle childhood can remove an object from one context, and bring it into another context, while still understanding that the object holds the same meaning.
**FEEDBACK TO BOOK**

After reading the book to adults, it is clear that the story presents solid and effective ideas for maintaining a relationship between child and parent when they are raced with separation. The question that continued to arise was, where the mother actually was. Initially I had wanted to present the mother character as incarcerated in prison, but only reveal this piece at the very end of the book. However, after reading it to myself and others several times, the last page presenting a woman looking out of a cell window somehow offered a dark connotation to a story which is attempting to convey a proactive approach to dealing with separation. Therefore, I left an ambiguity to the book, not allowing the reader to know exactly where the mother is. This way, the book can be used to address the theme of finding connectedness in permanent separation, rather than making the story and theme specific to children of incarcerated parents. While the specific subject of children of incarcerated parents is not only important to me as well as the driving force for this story, I felt the story would be more approachable and the theme more relevant if it was left to open-ended experiences of separation.

Many adjustments were made to the story after reading it to a variety of adults. At this point, I felt I was ready to read it to my 1st grade class of 6-year-old children. After reading the story, the students’ initial reactions were to specific parts of the story. For example, on child said that the ice cream reminded him of how he eats ice cream every Friday night after dinner. Another child wanted to share about a long plane ride and car ride she had taken,
remembering in the story that the boy had to take a plane ride to see his mom. A different student noticed that the word “did” kept repeating on almost every page when the boy talked about things he used to do with his mom.

After these initial reactions to the book, I needed to frame the theme of the book a little more for them. I decided to say the following: “Why do you think that the boy character is talking about things he would do with his mom?” To this questions one of the students said, “maybe because he misses her.” I asked the follow-up question of, “Why does he do these things when he misses his mom?” A student raised her hand and said, “Because it makes him really, really, really happy.” To which I asked, “Why does it make him so happy?” She answered, “Because he’s with his mom and he hasn’t seen her for a long time.” Obviously this comment focuses on the very beginning of the story when they boy and the mother are together. I then reminded my students that, “The book doesn’t say that he is doing these things with his mom, he’s saying he’s doing these things just like he and his mom used to do. So why would he be doing them alone now?” Following the question, another student raised her hand and said, “It will remind him of when he did it with his mom.” I agreed and said, “So if he can’t be with his mom, he’s doing the things that remind him of his mom.”

I decided to be more direct and say, “Sometimes when our grown-up is away for work or on vacation or something else when we can’t be with them even though we really want to be, there are different ways that we can make ourselves feel better about not being together.” This helped facilitate the following comments from different students:
“Sometimes in bed, if my daddy’s away, I ask my mom to tickle me because that’s what my dad does to me.”

“When my daddy’s away and I’m with my mom, the thing that makes me feel better, when my dad’s still away, on Friday after dinner I like it when my mom gives me ice-cream. That’s the way I think of him.”

“Once when Sammy and my mom and my dad were away and I was with my grandma all by myself, I always did the things that Sammy used to do, like playing Legos and stuff.”

“I always when my dad is away, my mom usually doesn’t go away if it’s not all of us, and I like to talk on the phone with him.”

“When I miss my dad, I sleep on the side of his bed.”

“When my mom’s away, I like to go to her house with my dad.”

“Sometimes when my mom’s away, I sometimes make her books.”

From these reflections and responses, it is obvious that this book will allow children to consider similar experiences they’ve had when they cannot be with their parent for any length of time. Because the book does not identify the reason for the young boy and his mother being separated, children can more easily find their place within the theme of the story. It has become clear that leaving the separation theme as open-ended was a good idea because of the various reasons a child could be separated from their parent.

The last person I decided to read my book to was Nancy. Because this story is based on Nancy’s life, it was important to me that I had captured the specific theme and emotions of her story. After Nancy read the book her
feedback was helpful. She loved the illustrations and felt that the singularity of
the objects were very impressive and conveyed the sense of the mother and son
being connected through these objects and actions. The one thing we did
discuss changing was the last page regarding the meaning of the moon in the
story. From her personal experience, she described using the moon with her son
Guillermo in a way that was very specific instead of an abstract object one of
them could look at whenever they felt sad, even if the other person wasn’t
looking at it. While that abstract connection could and did sometimes take place,
she wanted me to convey the specific sense of how exactly they used the moon
on a specific day at a specific time, so they were both looking up at the same
moon, at the same time. After listening to Nancy’s reasoning on this and thinking
it over, I agreed with her. The whole book carries a layering theme of
connectedness and the culminating idea of the moon needed to be the most
specific of the ways that boy and his mother could feel connected.
CONCLUSION

It has been stated that classroom culture across the country can represent a diversity of students who are dealing with or experiencing situations of separation from a parent(s). There are a number of reasons why a parent and child can or could be separated at different times in their lives including immigration, incarceration, deportation, deployment, sickness, death, divorce, job change or travel. Every child has their own unique experience, and needs support not only outside of school, but in the classroom as well. Finding the right literature that allows for students to connect their own experiences with a story can be very difficult. The importance of a story that can show a child and parent finding productive, healthy and positive ways to cope with separation, not revealing the reason for separation, can be extremely effective in the classroom. I believe my reasons for writing this story, my research on the topic as well as my close personal connection with this true story, has been captured and applied to my creation of “Our Moon”. As a result, I know that this book can serve as a valuable tool for teachers, children and parents who are coping with separation, whatever the reasons may be.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX I

“Our Moon”
Our Moon

Written & Illustrated by,
Tara Di Gerlando
This book is dedicated to K and C
and
parents and children who separated all over the world
My mom and I live far away from each other. I live with my aunt and uncle in Colorado and she’s in New York. I didn’t want to live so far away from her, but it just happened to turn out this way.
Once in a while, I go visit her.
When I pack my suitcase,
I always include my favorite book and puzzle.
I have to take a four hour plane ride.  
It feels like forever.
When I finally get to her, we give each other the biggest hug. I squeeze her as tight as I can.
When we’re together, we read my favorite book. She does all the voices, just how I like it.
When we’re together, we also do our favorite puzzle. We’ve done it a thousand times, we know it so well.
Visiting my mom is my favorite thing because, for a little while, I don’t have to miss her.
It’s the in between time that is so hard.
When I can’t be with my mom, we’ll write letters, telling each other about everything that’s been happening.
At times, we even get to talk on the phone.
But, my visits are rare, letters don’t come everyday and her phone calls only come once a week.
When it’s really lonely, I have other ways to feel close to her.
When I get ice cream on Sundays, I’ll always order one scoop of strawberry in a sugar cone, just like my mom and I always did.
After it rains really hard,
I’ll put on my galoshes and look for snails in the garden,
just like my mom and I always did.
At the beach in the summer,
I'll make the letters of my mom's name in the sand with rocks,
just like my mom always did for me.
Sometimes when it is really quiet,
I’ll strum the strings of my mom’s guitar.
Even though I can’t play, I like to move to it’s sound
the way my mom always did.
When it starts to get warm in the spring,
I’ll race my bike around the block three times after dinner.
When I used to do this with my mom,
we’d race and I would always win.
But, I don’t eat ice cream every day, 
it’s not always rainy, 
the guitar hardly gets played, 
I only go to the beach in August, 
and it’s not always warm enough to ride my bike.
But, then I remember what my mom said to me the night she had to leave...
“Even though we’re apart, we can still look up at the moon together.”
We will always have our moon.